

A Christian Church.

*Presented by the author*  
A

# SERMON,

DELIVERED ON

ASSUMING THE DUTIES OF PASTOR

OF THE

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER,

CINCINNATI, OHIO,

SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 1, 1863.

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By A. D. MAYO, PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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CINCINNATI:

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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# S E R M O N .

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Text : Coll. i, 18—" And he is the head of the body, the church."

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THIS morning I accept the office of pastor of this "Church of the Redeemer." The call to this charge has been made with such heartiness, unanimity, and peculiar felicity of circumstances, that it comes to me as a providential summons to leave an important post and a devoted people elsewhere. I came to you almost a stranger, seeking no new position; I remain because it seems to me the hand of God has led me up into this pulpit, and the voice of God commanded me to occupy this field of Christian labor. Of a connection so easily and beautifully formed, let us to-day prophecy nothing but good. It is subject to all human contingencies; but we can make it a better thing than we now dare to hope. May the blessing of heaven abide upon the union we consummate to-day.

This morning the "Church of the Redeemer" first takes its place among the Christian congregations of the land as a complete institution of religion. Hitherto, it has enjoyed the weekly ministrations of many able and devoted ministers, but I am its first pastor. We have waited long for each other, and are doubtless better fitted for the united work before us than at any previous time. We now take our position, we trust, with no undue pride in ourselves, and we hope with no lack of charity to others, as a complete Christian church. We shall permit no church or sect in Christendom to deny to us that cherished and sacred name. We shall surrender it to no new theory or policy of the hour. We

are called a Unitarian Church by the people; we have named ourselves "the Church of the Redeemer." We accept both these honored names; *but both these, and all the other good names we could wear, are only our way of saying that we claim to be a Christian church, according to our highest conception of the religion of Jesus Christ.* And as every church in Christendom claims that sacred title, and good men differ so widely concerning its meaning, let me, as your chosen preacher, set forth this morning our comprehension of what a true Christian church should be in its *doctrine, its organization, and its religious practice.*

#### WHAT IS OUR DOCTRINE?

As a Christian church, we have one object of worship—God, the Spirit, the Infinite Love, the "one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in you all." Him, the sole, uncreated, spiritual Creator of all things; law of the material universe; Parent of all souls, from whom proceeded and toward whom proceeds the universe forever, we worship. To Him alone we pray; and subordinate to Him we hold all persons, agencies, circumstances in the eternal life. We cast ourselves entirely on Him, with perfect confidence in His power, wisdom and beneficence, believing He created all things in love, and all things shall finally unite to glorify His holy name.

We look upon the physical universe as the work of God, pervaded evermore by His presence, based upon His spiritual being, serving its best end when it symbolizes His perfections; and we welcome all real science that unvails its laws as the revelation of the Creator. We would interpose no barrier to the complete investigation of the material world, having no fear that true science will leave any generation in

atheism, and believing that the cure for the skepticism born of a superficial knowledge of nature, is a deeper and wider insight into her mysteries.

But our highest interest in the works of God centers on man. We believe man is the immortal child of God; of Divine parentage; endowed with capacities that qualify him for an eternal progress toward the Infinite Love. He is born a helpless infant; he comes gradually into possession of his powers; his spiritual faculties are the last that are reached in his providential education. At the worst, he is a bad, at the best, in this world, he is a good *child of God*. But good or bad, infantile or mature, he is God's beloved child; and God is pledged to give him all discipline, retribution, guidance, needful to his success in the immortal life.

We joyfully welcome the supreme obligation of man announced by Jesus—"Be ye perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect." We set up no ideal of human excellence lower than the perfect love of God. We hold the soul, society, the race of mankind, man in every position in which he can be placed, strictly and unflinchingly to this lofty rule of duty. We claim for him all the moral freedom he needs to go toward God forever; we are confident of all the Divine aid needful to his success. His only real life is his spiritual life of love to God and man; his only real death is the failure to reach that high estate. We shrink from no punishment that will awaken the soul or society from the torpor of that death. We can wait a myriad ages for the least man to come to himself, and turn to the Father. We proclaim our faith in God and man indissoluble, and insist that man shall be judged by the highest moral law, because he is the child of the Almighty.

Thus believing in one God of infinite love, and man his



immortal child, and the highest spiritual obligation for every human soul, we look upon life with unshaken confidence in the destiny of all spirits. We know as much of the sin and weakness in the world as those who think man is naturally depraved. We are as jealous for the honor of God's law as they who can not conceive a universe without an everlasting hell. We know the history of the race as correctly as any of the civil or religious prophets of human despair. But we believe God is the infinite Providence; that life everywhere is but another name for the beneficent education of His beloved child. We read the past of every man, every combination of men, of humanity itself, as the record of God's discipline. We see man to-day better than at any previous period of his career; and amid clouds or sunshine, predict the success of every soul; the success of a Christian civilization on earth; the harmony of the spiritual universe in heaven.

We teach that God is evermore in communication with man. He approaches him in nature, especially through the human body, which is the incarnation of the soul. He comes yet nearer in the wondrous providence we call our life, which is only God leading us through eternity, with or against our will. He draws yet nearer in those chosen spirits who are inspired to teach and lead their fellow-beings into religion, the sum of truth and life. He is even more directly present in that inward spirit, which men call by many names, but which is God in man. It is the privilege of every soul to be instructed by God in all these ways. It is the obligation of every soul to use its uttermost of faculty and devotion, amid such opportunities, to learn truth and goodness. And when all is done that can be accomplished, reason and conscience, or the final response of our whole being, must be the measure



of our creed and life, for which we are responsible to God alone.

We joyfully declare our faith in Jesus Christ, as the highest manifestation of God to man—the chosen Teacher and Saviour of the soul and the race. We do not worship him, but the Father whom he worshiped, and regard the ascription of Divine honors to him as only the highest form of idolatry. We do not pretend to measure his nature by any scholastic or radical theory, or assume to solve the mystery of his precise rank in the scale of being. Knowing that the least man is too mighty for our comprehension, we stand before this vast nature as inquirers and disciples rather than critics. We do not intend to permit any catechism, or ecclesiastical corporation, or priesthood to step between us and our Lord ; but hope to get near him ourselves, and behold with our own spiritual faculties his ineffable loveliness. We are so glad he came into the world, that we do not speculate on the question how the world would have got on without him. We feel so intensely his saving power in our own lives, that we dare not reject his authority over our souls. We honor the “Sun of Righteousness,” all the more because the universe is filled with lesser lights, reflecting and referring to his central radiance. We can not yet see beyond him, and believe his character still the model of human excellence, and his religion as essential to Cincinnati to-day as to Jerusalem in the old time. He seems to us God’s best beloved son, sent to represent to man all ways of revealing Divine truth. He shows us God in nature by his sympathy with her laws and his works of power. He reveals the providence in life through his own wondrous experience. His teaching is the sum and substance of religious truth. He proclaims the Infinite Spirit in communion with the soul. His religion is the wor-

ship of the Infinite Love. He saves us as the great and good save us, in ways as numerous as the resources of God and man; and, beyond all known human power, attracts us and the world with a force that increases as the centuries pass away. We sit at his feet, and call ourselves by his dear name, and through him draw near to God.

We use the Bible as the record of God's highest revelation to mankind. We do not set it up as our idol to worship, or read its paragraphs as theological charms to conjure with, or compromise its value by an impossible fancy of verbal inspiration. But in the Hebrew Nation and its greatest men we see the channel of the highest religious inspiration vouchsafed to any ancient people; and in Jesus and the early history of Christianity, the appearance of the absolute religion of love. In the Old Testament we find the record of the former, and every day of our newest American life only attests more loudly the value of its lessons of God's providential dealing with mankind. But the New Testament is the Christian's Bible, and there is enough to save us and all the world from superstition and sin. We read The Book with the aid of ancient and modern scholarship, fearing no just criticism. But the real commentary on the Scriptures is Life, and as we live from day to day, new emergencies arise and new experiences appear, which perpetually send us back to its pages to find the deepest wisdom and Divine aid. We go to it burdened with no man's creed, but laden with our own wants and hopes and fears, and find it more precious every day we live.

This is but a meagre outline of the doctrine of our church, which every mind must fill up according to its best comprehension of Christian truth. For we hold the truth as infinitely precious, and demand for ourselves, as we grant to all

men, perfect liberty; the liberty of a reverent and constant examination after the facts concerning our spiritual life. We condemn irreverent, trifling, rash and crude speculation, and partisan advocacy, as a wretched caricature of freedom; for no man has the right to approach these awful themes of religion with other than a single desire to know the truth. So we do not fetter our disciples with a written creed, but trust to the unwritten accord of sincere minds and hearts for our unity.

Of course, they who differ so widely from us, that they count us heretics, will keep away from our "heresy." All who despise our faith, as a remnant of old superstition, will be only too eager to leave us to ourselves. We invite all to come and help us learn of Christ, confident that those will remain with whom we can have a practical sympathy in faith or that union of charity which is better than any unanimity of belief. We shall freely expose all religious doctrines that seem to us untrue. But we assail no man's religious character because of his honest faith, and rejoice that men and churches can do so much for religion, in spite of their error. Yet we are firmly convinced that these views of God and man, duty and destiny, Christ and the Scriptures, and especially that Christian liberty which seems always to lead to them, are the most reasonable and religious. We believe they are good for all men; that the most spiritual character, the holiest life, the finest civilization flow from them. We see in the present condition of our beloved country the most painful proof of their absence in our past; and we have no confidence that America can be a true Republic, until Americans are converted to Christ's religion of love. We have seen the influence of that religion in life: we know how it inspires for labor, consoles in trouble, give the largest wisdom in

counsel, and the best fidelity to duty, supports in death and glorifies the future. We are willing to live and die by it, and invite all men to share the joy and peace we find therein.

#### WHAT IS OUR ORGANIZATION ?

A Christian Church is far more than the best theology. It is an organization of men, women and children to convert that theology into life ; a school of religion, whose disciples shall learn to bear themselves with Christian dignity in larger spheres of existence. A church should be a miniature of human society, which in its turn should be an image of the Kingdom of God. It should be a spiritual gymnasium, where the mind is trained to seek the highest truth ; the affections to love God and man ; the will to shape a character, and all the activities to fashion a manly or womanly career in time and eternity. It is not a cloister into which the saints may withdraw to avoid this world and dream of an ecclesiastic's or a fanatic's heaven ; but the most central and sacred inclosure into which God's children may gather, and hold communion to gain strength for life here and everywhere.

For such an end we have established our "Church of the Redeemer." We have chosen the simplest congregational form of organization, as best combining the advantages of individual freedom and united activity. In our Sunday morning and evening services, we shall endeavor to cultivate the spirit of true worship, not despising any forms that will enrich our devotional life ; for men never really know each other, or know God till they have learned to pray together. We shall vindicate the largest liberty of the preacher to present the varied aspects of Christian doctrine and practice to the soul and society. We shall assert the sacred right of the hearer to examine and judge on all he hears ; trying



to generate throughout the church an atmosphere of mutual respect and charity, in which the truth may take root and blossom and bear much fruit. We shall endeavor to expand our Sunday school into a true children's church, where the best mind and heart in our congregation shall be enlisted to lead them to Christ, and attach them to this their religious home. The social gatherings of our people can easily become a beautiful school of Christian refinement and pleasure; and we shall maintain, along with them, on alternate weeks, a meeting for religious conversation, and the study of the Scriptures. We invite all to the celebration of the ordinances of the Church; looking on the Christian Communion and Baptism, not as a test of saintship, but as means of religious growth. We demand no subscription to elaborate articles of faith, and have no ecclesiastical court for the punishment of heresy or sin; for while any man is drawn to us by a genuine sympathy, we hope to persuade him to renounce his errors, and repent of his sins; and if any man comes here to insult Christianity by a scoffing spirit or an impure life, he will probably find the house too hot for him, without the need of theological court-martial. In our woman's benevolent society there is ample scope for charity to the poor, the soldier, the freedman, the outcast, the widow and the orphan. We have machinery enough to turn this city up side down, and redeem this great State of its superstition and sin. All that now is wanting is that every man, woman and child shall take that post of duty best adapted for the peculiar power of each, and labor with determined will to make this Church one of the permanent Institutions on which society, in this Republic, shall repose as on a pillar of adamant.

## WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE ?

We know very well that the final result of our work must be the regeneration of men's lives, the reformation of society and the salvation of man, according to the law of love. We might become the most learned and enlightened theologians and yet not redeemed from one sin. We might organize here an ecclesiastical corporation more oppressive and demoralizing than any secular corporation can be; because, arrogating a false authority over the soul, or debauching the higher reason and conscience of the community. Therefore we pray to be delivered from a fall into sectarian ambition, or the lower deep of a fashionable religion, though we shall certainly try to build up a citadel of the truth, and hope to make pure religion the fashion everywhere. And to this end we shall labor to regenerate each other's souls, by implanting the principle of love to God and man and truth and duty in the deepest places of our spirits, and making it the guide of our lives. We aim to produce no monastic or unnatural type of piety; but to lead all human affections into the sweet channels of Divine Love, faith in the beneficent Providence, and communion with the Father of souls. We shall not expect to graduate a school of irreverent or insane reformers, but build each other up in that large, wise and practical philanthropy, which, through peace and war, storm and calm, triumph and gloom pursues its unswerving path to the highest good of every human creature on God's earth. We want to unite our intelligence, piety, morality, and philanthropy into one Christian character, arrayed in the graces that adorn the Christ, and are the rightful heritage of his disciples. Our personal religious faith shall not be like the fitful lightning flaring in at the window, darting a lurid glare through a darkened house; but like the in-



terior of the home as seen at twilight by the cheerful glow of the flame on the hearth, revealing the pictured faces on the wall, the comfort and elegance of the room, the group around the table; or like that home when the powerful sunlight streams through its open casements, flooding every damp and dusty corner with purifying light and warmth. We need a personal religion that will make each of us one of God's true men or women; genial for social life; efficient for common labor; wise for counsel; firm in principle; heroic for endurance; terrible for judgment on infamy; gentle as he who took little children in his arms; strong as he who stilled the sea, and prophesied the downfall of Jerusalem, and bore his own cross up Calvary.

And as the legitimate result of this personal religion, we shall do all in our power to regenerate American society from superstition and sin. The root of all our social and public evils is a false religion. If every man in America saw in his brother the image of God, and like God and Christ gave his life to raise that man to his divine estate of wisdom and holiness, there would be neither slave nor rebel, and in place of the clash of infernal war, would float in the song of heavenly peace. We seek first to elevate society by elevating its faith in God and man; for no people will act above its religion. We must parley with no sin of man or State; but we must also remember that all sin is destroyed from within by elevating the character of the individual and the moral tone of society. An irreligious or fanatical reformer is a man who stands beating off the heads of a hydra, which evermore blossoms into new forms of Satanic horror. A Christian philanthropist is a man who hates sin so firmly that he is willing to devote his whole life to organizing an order of society that shall destroy by overgrowing, uprooting, and sup-

planting it. So, while we as a church bear implacable testimony to truth and purity, liberty and social order in American society, and will consecrate the fortunes of our men, the toil and prayers of our women, the lives of our most precious youth, to preserve those blessed institutions which have been handed down to us by our fathers, we have not the least idea of pinning our faith in human progress to any transient theory or policy. We intend to work for a Christian civilization in America, whatever happens to-day or to-morrow. Let our armies march to victory or defeat; let parties rise or fall; let president, cabinet, and Congress legislate and proclaim; let even worse confusion reign than our eyes have yet beholden, we still abide by our faith that Christianity as we preach and try to organize and apply it, is the sovereign cure for all American ills; the central soul of our social and civil order; the assurance of political liberty; the only basis of permanent union in family or State. We expect to see contention, sorrow, trouble through the wide realms of our new civilization, till that civilization is brought in range of Christ's golden rule. And we shall stand by our faith in the God who never yet forsook humanity in any strait; in man who never so completely lost the road of progress, that he did not recover it; in all those sacred ideas of liberty and union, which will assuredly come out victorious in the great war against despotism and its twin sister Anarchy. We shall be incorruptible patriots if we can become Christians "according to the pattern shown in the Mount."

But our views of human life are not bounded by the walls of our family, our country or our career in this world. The least soul is immortal, and claims a destiny which mocks at the limits of time, and surpasses the grandeur of earthly

success. The family of man has a higher relationship than that recorded in history, even with God's spiritual universe. That Church will miserably fail that does not lift the soul into this eternal world, while yet inhabiting its tenement of clay, and bring all human interests into unison with the everlasting kingdom of God. No man can comprehend this world, or do its work in the noblest way, till he has risen above it into the eternal life, where he lives with God and spiritual realities. No people can become truly great till it looks beyond the events and policy of to-day, and lays hold on those ideas of eternal justice which are the law of the Most High. So does our work culminate in the salvation of souls and the redemption of humanity.

O! it is a sublime office to lead one spirit finally above the clouds and mists of a material and worldly life, to repose on the sunlit uplands of perennial faith in God; and if we can win the humblest child to this salvation, we have done that over which a society of angels might rejoice. No privilege compares with that of bearing unshaken testimony to what is eternal amid the fluctuations of time; and if we can stand here, year in and year out, the witnesses of the highest and holiest in life, we may envy no monarch his throne. Heaven grant that whoever comes within the atmosphere of our communion, may feel a new loftiness of view, a new sincerity of purpose, a holy cheerfulness, and a perfect peace stealing in upon his soul; and that as we go on in our good work, society shall insensibly wear a new and wondrous grace and power, as the irresistible spring colors the earth and changes the sky. So shall many souls be saved, and this world be transformed to the kingdom of God.

Such is our ideal of a Christian Church. We know how far we are below it, but we pray for strength to approach

nearer. We lift up our standard and invite all to come to us who feel moved by sympathy of mind or heart. We seek to pull down no temple that represents heaven to its honest worshiper; but we would build up our own so broad and fair, that these narrow inclosures of religious sect and caste shall be compelled to expand, to meet the growing wants of those within. If we establish here a powerful Church, according to this Christian ideal, it will be felt in every soul, in every corner of society, from length to breadth of our republic; yea, its influence will overleap oceans and continents, and those who go out from us will bear it in their hearts to distant lands. And beyond the confines of mortality will its power extend; for spirits enraptured with the glories of a larger life in grander worlds shall not forget the Sabbath days of their mortality within these walls below. May God accept our vows on this day of our union, as pastor and people. May He grant His infinite grace, that we may build a Church on earth, which shall be a lively symbol of the Church in Heaven.



